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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MARCH 24 MEETING WITH ROK FM BAN:
UNSYG RACE, NORTH KOREA, ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION

REF: A. SEOUL 911
 IB. BEIJING 5351
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Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) During a March 24 meeting with the Ambassador, ROK Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon described receiving strong expressions of support for his candidacy for UN Secretary General from Argentina, Peru, Egypt, Algeria and Nigeria. Ban noted that he has met with the foreign ministers of each of the P-5 nations and said he would keep the United States fully informed of the progress of his candidacy. Expressing frustration that the Chinese had not focused on the nuclear issue during the visit to China of Kim Jong-il, Ban urged that President Bush emphasize the Six Party Talks during his April meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao. Ban warned against the United States taking unilateral action on the environmental remediation issue and said the ROK had strongly protested the repatriation to China of North Korean refugee Choi Eun-sun. The Ambassador urged the ROK to accept the "LaPorte Proposal" on environmental remediation and underscored our desire to work with the ROK in accepting North Korean refugees for resettlement in the United States.

CAMPAIGN FOR SECRETARY GENERAL

¶12. (C) The Ambassador met for 45 minutes on March 24 with ROK Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon. Ban noted that he had recently traveled to Latin America to seek support for his candidacy to be UN Secretary General; he had also accompanied ROK President Roh Moo-hyun on his trip to Africa (Roh's trip reported septel). In Argentina, said Ban, he had seen Vice President Scioli and the President of the Senate. In Peru, President Toledo had stressed that he regarded Ban as a good friend and the ROK as a good friend of Peru. (Toledo had even escorted Ban to his car.) Ban explained that although

neither Argentina nor Peru had made any public comment on his candidacy, Argentine Foreign Minister Taiana and Peruvian Foreign Minister Maurtua had both privately assured Ban of their support.

¶3. (C) During President Roh Moo-hyun's trip to Egypt, President Mubarak had told Roh that Egypt would support Ban's candidacy. Nigerian President Obasanjo had also been very encouraging during Roh's stop there. Describing Roh's visit to Algeria as one of his best ever, Ban said President Bouteflika had been markedly enthusiastic in endorsing Ban's candidacy. Ban acknowledged that none of these countries were currently members of the Security Council, but said it was helpful to build an atmosphere of support for his candidacy. Noting he knew Egyptian Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit very well from their time together at the United Nations, Ban said that Aboul Gheit had volunteered that his candidacy had been positively discussed during a recent meeting of Arab foreign ministers.

¶4. (C) Overall, Ban indicated he was very encouraged by reactions to his candidacy in the month since it had been announced. He had met with each of the P-5 foreign ministers, including three times with French Foreign Minister Doste-Blazy, and would see FM Lavrov in Moscow again in April. Although none of the Security Council member states had publicly expressed support, Ban said he could sense that several would support him; no one had expressed negative sentiments. Ban assured the Ambassador he would continue to consult closely on his candidacy.

SIX PARTY TALKS

¶5. (C) The Ambassador noted that recent public statements out of North Korea had been very harsh. We had made a significant gesture by providing the New York briefing to Li Gun on our financial measures and had told the North Koreans that issues such as trade and financial relations could be discussed at the Six Party Talks as part of the talks on normalization. We hoped Seoul would send a strong message to Pyongyang that it was time to come back to the negotiations.

¶6. (C) FM Ban said it was important not to put too much emphasis on the DPRK's public statements. Although recent statements were negative, earlier Foreign Ministry pronouncements of a crackdown on narcotics trafficking and of the DPRK's willingness to abide by international financial standards were encouraging. The earlier statements might mean that Pyongyang had understood the tough message it had received from the United States; it was important to provide the North Koreans with a pretext to return to the talks.

¶7. (C) Ban said he had been very frustrated upon discovering that the Chinese had apparently not placed great emphasis on the Six Party Talks during the visit to China of Kim Jong-il. He had hoped that Beijing would engage Kim in serious, in-depth discussions on the issue. He urged that President Bush focus on the DPRK nuclear issue during Chinese President Hu Jintao's upcoming visit to the United States and press the Chinese to make greater efforts to bring the DPRK back to the talks.

DPRK REFUGEES

¶8. (C) The Ambassador said he had been very disappointed to hear of the repatriation from China to the DPRK of Choi Eun-sun (aka Kim Chun-hee and Lee Chun-shil), the North Korean woman who had been apprehended outside of a Korean school in China. Besides the possibility that Choi would be harshly treated by DPRK authorities, such actions by Beijing gave Pyongyang the impression that China would protect it, rather than push the DPRK to return to the Six Party Talks.

¶9. (C) Ban replied that the ROK had lodged a strong protest

with the Chinese about the repatriation of Choi. The South Koreans had raised the case seven times with the Chinese, said Ban, adding that he had personally discussed it with Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing. The Chinese had explained that although they had not repatriated those North Koreans who had been detained after entering the school, they considered Choi, who was apprehended outside of the school, as falling into a different category. Ban said the Chinese still held the other North Koreans who had been apprehended after entering the school; the PRC was imposing certain conditions on their release -- such as that they travel with a third country passport -- that the ROK could not meet.

¶10. (C) The Ambassador pointed out that the issue was not where North Korean were apprehended; they should be treated as refugees given the punishment they face if returned to the DPRK, and refugees should be referred to the UNHCR, not repatriated. Noting that we hoped to receive a formal ROK response in the next few days to our ref C proposal to work with Thailand, Mongolia and Russia to process some North Koreans for resettlement in the United States, the Ambassador emphasized that we wanted to cooperate with the ROK on the issue.

ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION

¶11. (C) The Ambassador observed that the latest round of Strategic Policy Initiative talks had not gone well, particularly on the issue of environmental remediation. The Department of Defense intended to inform the ROK on March 31 that it would proceed with implementation of the "LaPorte proposal" to address the issue of pollution on former American bases through the "bioslurping" method. "I appeal to you one last time," said the Ambassador, to accept the LaPorte proposal, which represented a significant level of clean-up beyond what the SOFA required.

¶12. (C) Once DOD began environmental remediation, the Ambassador continued, it would be important to manage the media and public reaction. Rather than characterizing the DOD actions as unilateral, the ROK should note that it welcomed the fact that the U.S. was taking substantial steps to improve the environmental conditions of the properties being returned.

¶13. (C) The ROK appreciated the "LaPorte Proposal", said Ban, who added that he was also eager to reach a speedy agreement on environmental remediation. The ROK would continue to work toward a mutually acceptable solution, but unilateral action would be undesirable. Ban urged the United States to be sensitive to the domestic political scene, pointing out that local elections were being held in May and suggesting the issue be held until the May session of SPI.
VERSHBOW